

Expeditionary Medical Unit prepares new hospital for incoming staff replacements

Story by Lance Cpl. Adam C. Schnell

CAMP LEMONIER, Djibouti – After nearly six months of supporting Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, the service members of the Expeditionary Medical Unit here prepare for their journey back to the United States.

Their stateside co-workers from fleet hospitals in Jacksonville, Fla., Portsmouth, Va., and Charleston, S.C., will replace the current members for the next six months.

“We have worked with our replacements prior to coming here makes for a great transition,” said Navy Lt. Richard W. Schulz, critical care nurse for the Navy’s first EMU. “This way when we’re gone we are still just a phone call away.”

With a new hospital dedicated just last week, the Coram, N.Y., native said, the successors will have a cleaner, more spacious way of treating the members of CJTF-HOA. The six-bed hospital also provides more privacy for patients needing care.

“They have everything they need, we’ve put it in place for them,” said Schulz.

For many of the EMU’s members, leaving brings mixed feelings. Many of them have built relationships with one another that will last a lifetime, Schulz said.

“They’re the best group I’ve ever worked with,” said Schulz. “Everyone gets along really well, and it shows in the care we give.”

Most are happy to go back and see family members, but one corpsman looks back to his last six months as an experience of a lifetime.

“I never thought I’d be in Africa shooting a lot

of different weapons with Germans and Marines,” said Seaman Brandon S. Crocker, general corpsman for the EMU.

The past six months for the EMU has been a lot of work, said Schulz. From setting up and taking over the medical team in a joint environment, to moving into the new hospital, the EMU has been very busy.

“We were able to see patients only five days after we arrived here,” said Schulz.

To be capable of making such a smooth transition, the members of the EMU had a lot of training before arriving at Camp Lemonier. The most memorable for some was the Los Angeles Trauma Training Program.

“Everyone worked side by side in the trauma training program,” said Schulz. “We were all exhausted at the end of each day.”

The participants spent many 14-hour days dealing with trauma victims. The intense 29-day program was meant to prepare much of the staff for the deployment.



Photo by Sgt. Bradley Shaver

HN Chris Barnes, hospital corpsman with the Expeditionary Medical Unit here, X-Rays a patient's arm in the old radiology room Oct. 21. The Navy's first EMU has expanded their medical care to a Level III environment for personnel supporting Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa.

Although the team mainly trains and works in Naval hospitals, their mission supporting CJTF-HOA has been a joint operation. Petty Officer 3rd Class George W. Barr, a medical laboratory technician with the EMU, said he has gained a lot of respect for the other branches.

“I especially gained the most respect for the Marines here,” said Barr. “They’re doing a great job providing force protection and just the way they carry themselves on camp.”

Schulz added that everything out here is joint environment.

“We’re in the Navy on a base with the force protection provided by Marines, a medical evacuation team made up of Air Force personnel, and we treat everyone including soldiers and coalition personnel,” he said.

One perfect example of their joint operations with CJTF-HOA was supporting the Army civil affairs battalions here by providing medical support during Medical Civic Action Programs. The EMU provided at least six people every month to participate in the MEDCAPs.

The soldiers of the civil affairs battalion have treated thousands of people during the past year. The MEDCAP’s main mission is to build long-lasting relationships by helping communities with free medicine to improve the health of the area.

“It felt really rewarding when we went out and helped the communities with the MEDCAPs,” said Crocker. “I think it also made them look at us a little differently.”

In the past six months, the EMU has supported many different aspects of training in CJTF-HOA. From MEDCAPs to providing medical support for live-fire range exercises, the EMU has been a vital part in supporting in CJTF-HOA’s mission in the Global War on Terrorism.

“We realize that it’s a different type of war we are fighting over here,” said Schulz. “We’re just happy to be here and do our part to help the people in this region.”



Photo by Sgt. Matthew B. Roberson

The Expeditionary Medical Unit treats simulated casualties during an exercise held at the Camp Lemonier. The EMU’s capabilities The Navy’s first Expeditionary Medical Unit along with the Forward Resuscitative Surgical System tested their abilities to handle casualties in a forward deployed environment during an exercise held here in November.